

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 298 359

CG 019 822

AUTHOR Burdyslaw, Cynthia; Fowler, Marilyn
TITLE Family Life Education through Teen Theatre.
PUB DATE Sep 86
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Public Health Association (114th, Las Vegas, NV, September 28-October 2, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; Contraception; Decision Making; *Family Life Education; Parent Child Relationship; *Peer Teaching; Program Development; Sexuality; *Theater Arts; *Youth Programs

ABSTRACT

This paper describes how to create a teenage theatre project and explains why such a project is effective in educating teenagers. New Image Teen Theatre is a project which has combined peer education and improvisational theater since 1981 to reach teenagers with accurate family planning information, encourage communication, and promote responsible decision making. Results from 3 years of pre/post testing show a 28% to 100% increase in knowledge about sexuality and contraception among cast members and teen audiences. Training and staff requirements for setting up a teenage theatre program are met by a budget of \$25,000. Following open auditions and special training sessions on sexuality, contraception, sexual abuse, and substance abuse, the cast collaborates to write a repertoire of skits. Performances at Parent Teacher Association meetings, schools, churches, and youth and professional groups bring humor to the audience; release audience tension; and allow the audience to take in information, ask questions, and make comments freely. The paper concludes that the New Image program models responsible reactions to peer pressure to have sex and to use drugs, and communicates the harsh realities of teenage pregnancy.
(Author/NB)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

☒ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official
OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Cynthia

Burdyslaw

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION THROUGH TEEN THEATRE

by Cynthia Burdyslaw, Producer, New Image Teen Theatre
Planned Parenthood of San Diego and Riverside Counties
and

Marilyn Fowler, MPA, The Development Company

I. ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

ED298359
Teenagers are a unique population and teen theatre is an effective approach to family life education for them. The concept of family life teen theatre began in New York City in 1973. Teen theatre combines the impact and believability of peer education with dramatic presentation to engage the mind and the emotions. Teens listen to their peers; they feel a mutual understanding.¹

Planned Parenthood of San Diego and Riverside Counties adopted New York's teen theatre model in 1981 and created New Image Teen Theatre. The troupe's goal is to provide accurate information, encourage family and peer discussion regarding teen issues, and promote responsible decision making. By Spring 1986 New Image has performed for over 25,000 people in San Diego County. Response indicates the goal is being achieved for the cast members, their families and audiences.

CG 019822
The cast benefits from an extensive summer training in theatre techniques, and topics related to sexuality and a variety of teen concerns. Three years of testing shows a 100% increase of knowledge. The training enables each of them to be a walking resource center and referral agency. Cast members disseminate information not only through their live performances but they are also often approached with questions by their peers at school.

Cast members participate with their parents permission. Parents

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

are included in the sexuality training and are shown videos of previous New Image troupes to acquaint them with the project. All cast members and their families have reported better family communication as a result of New Image. The increase in self-esteem is the greatest benefit to cast members. This comes with the admiration they receive from their peers, and the acceptance they feel from each other and the supervising adults. Their participation in teen theatre gives them a sense of helping others and providing an important contribution to society.

Ten multi-ethnic cast members are selected in open auditions each May. After summer training, topical skits are improvised by the teens. Finally, scripts are polished to form the repertoire and the teens perform for live audiences October through May. Our first year, we performed 32 shows for 3,454 people. Our second year, we had 37 shows for 4,768 people. We now perform approximately 50 shows for 6500 people during one season.

A typical New Image performance consists of short skits and monologues working sensitively with such topics as peer pressure, parent-teen communication, teen pregnancy, sex roles, substance abuse, date rape, and teen suicide. New Image is invited to perform regularly in the public schools for junior and senior high level students, at professional conferences and inservices, for clubs and youth service agencies, churches and parent organizations. A video preview can be arranged so that the sponsoring organization can pre-select the skits of their choice.

II. RESPONSE

Two of the past year's most popular skits have been SCIENCE, and THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF REPRODUCTION. SCIENCE is a humorous look at

peer pressure involving sexual activity and alcohol use. Options are looked at and the statistics revealing that 2/3 of all 16-year-old girls and 1/2 of the boys are virgins dispell the common myth among teens that "everyone is doing it." THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF REPRODUCTION features a doctor providing information in a matter-of-fact as well as laughable manner on different birth control matters, stressing that saying no to sex is the only 100% effective method of preventing pregnancy.

The response from audiences has been overwhelmingly positive. Two thirds of parents and half of teens reported on evaluations that viewing a New Image show increased their ability to communicate on these issues. Pre and post testing of teen audiences shows a 28 to 100% increase in knowledge of adolescent sexuality and birth control.

The value of peer education is evident when 300 eighth graders remain focused on a 45-minute show and report afterwards that it will be easier to say no to being pressured to have sex and use drugs. Teen theatre has developed student awareness of the consequences of sexual activity, i.e. STDs and pregnancy.

The letters we receive from school administrators express their appreciation and state that teen theatre performances are well-received, timely and the best assemblies that their schools have sponsored. New Image has become a regular part of many schools' family life curriculum.

The Working Together Project funded by the California State Office of Family Planning sponsors educational companion programs for high risk youths in conjunction with New Image performances. The performances serve as powerful discussion starters, encouraging open and honest interaction between teens and family life educators. The

project director reports an average increase in knowledge of 20% among these teens.

III. VIDEO PRODUCTIONS

In 1983, New Image first took its live stage show and adapted it to television to reach a wider audience. TEENS TALKING SEX received an Emmy Award for Outstanding Achievement in Local Children's Programming and has been broadcast to over 85,000 San Diegans. In 1985, KPBS-TV produced the NEW IMAGE TEEN THEATRE program which has already received two national awards; an Alpha Award for Excellence from the American Children's Television Festival and the Local Programming Award for Excellence in Children's Programming from the Corporation of Public Broadcasting. In June 1986, the video won an Emmy for excellence in Children's Programming, locally. This program was made possible by a grant from the Junior League of San Diego with additional support from San Diego Target Stores. It is available for \$90 from Planned Parenthood of San Diego. To date, 11 family planning agencies have purchased it to add to their curriculum materials. The video is also available from KPBS-TV at San Diego State University for broadcast airing on your local PBS station.

Recently, New Image has made a significant contribution as a forerunner in addressing the issues of incest. Working closely with testimonials of members of Daughters/Sons United (children who are incest victims), the troupe has developed dramatic material which portrays the realities of the incest victim and provides important information about finding help. The Independent Order of Foresters, a fraternal insurance organization working in the field of child abuse prevention, has co-produced a video of this material for use in its nation-wide volunteer training program. This video, "ONE OUT OF SIX,"

has been approved by four San Diego County School Districts for use in family life and decision making courses as well as for staff training. It is available for \$50 from our Planned Parenthood affiliate.

IV. BENEFITS TO THE TEEN THEATRE SPONSOR

The benefits of teen theatre for the sponsoring organization are numerous. In 1981, the Youth Health Services of New York Medical College in New York City reported a 27% increase in teen utilization of medical services and an anticipated rise to 3,000 patients as a result of the influence of their Family Life Theatre productions. ²

Extensive positive public relations are generated by a teen theatre. For example, prior to 1981, our Planned Parenthood affiliate had not had any favorable reporting in the local major newspaper for the previous nine years. Since the establishment of New Image, we have had favorable feature articles appear every year in that publication as well as in every other local paper. All three major San Diego television news stations and entertainment shows have covered the troupe. New Image has appeared on numerous radio stations. In the 1985/86 fiscal year, 580,000 San Diegans learned about New Image through TV and radio programming.

Another positive outcome of New Image has been the development of new working relationships with community groups who did not formerly affiliate with Planned Parenthood. These groups include the Girl Scouts, Black and Hispanic youth groups and community leaders.

V. NECESSITIES

Creation of a teen theatre is dependent upon funding sources and a dedicated, resourceful staff. The staff requirements include a project coordinator/producer/publicist, a theatre director and the teen cast members. A teen theatre will have the best results if their

production is as professional as possible. The cast must be heard, so training in voice projection is important. The script material must be creative and relevant, and the staging innovative and appealing to teens. Acknowledgement of New Image's professionalism is found in an Los Angeles Times theatre review where New Image is referred to as "the hottest agitprop theatre in town, putting a fresh uncompromising face on sex education." 3

Teen actors can be found and recruited from high school drama classes, theatre and youth groups. The director needs to have extensive directing experience with a background in voice, movement and improvisation, as well as the ability to interact well with teens.

Funding a teen theatre is possible through various sources. New Image is now maintained on income generated by performance fees and small grants from local foundations. Our first three years, we were on a California State Office of Family Planning grant and performed for free. The fourth season, we charged \$100 per show and now charge \$200 per show. Various PTAs and churches sponsor free, open performances which we advertise to the community through mailing out and distributing leaflet posters.

Our stage work on incest has brought in the greatest amount of monetary support from the Child Abuse Prevention Foundation and the Independent Order of Foresters. Private donations to Planned Parenthood account for 1/6 of our total budget.⁴ Other underwriters are the Rotary Club and Favrot Fund.

The sponsor needs to provide a rehearsal space, (New Image uses the Planned Parenthood Board meeting room), secretarial services, utilities, and a vehicle to transport the troupe. A New Image booklet is available which gives tips and a training outline for starting a

troupe. It also includes 11 of the most popular skits of the last five years.

At a time when 4 out of 10 teenage girls will become pregnant, 1 out of 10 teens will contract an STD, and over half of teens are sexually active--innovative methods of education must be used to reach teens. Teen theatre does this by providing accurate information, modeling responsible decision making and giving parents and teens an avenue for open discussion on such topics as sexuality, choices, responsibilities, substance abuse and incest.

REFERENCES

1. Los Angeles Regional Family Planning Association, "Study On Peer Education Effectiveness".
2. American Journal of Public Health, February 1981, Vol. 71, No. 2, Maria C. Boria, MD, MPH, Edward J. Welch, MA and Anthony M. Vargas, BA, "Family Life Theatre and Youth Health Services".
3. San Diego County Los Angeles Times, February 5, 1986.

4. BUDGET FOR A TEEN THEATRE PROJECT

Coordinator/Producer, full-time	\$17,000
Director 700 hours at \$8 per hour	5,600
Cast 10 at \$200 each	2,000
Publicist 130 hours at \$15 per hour	1,950
printing	600
postage	300
advertising (studio photos donated)	200
mileage	200
production supplies: tape player, props, t-shirts, voice and movement workshops	700
misc. expenses: tech people for public shows, audio/video tape, conferences, banquet	600
Planned Parenthood space rental	550
Planned Parenthood telephone	295
Administrative spread	<u>4,676</u>

TOTAL: \$34,671